open wide our hearts
the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 8 Activity: Understanding Individual vs. Institutional Racism

Doctrinal elements:
Grade: 8
Doctrinal Elements: The Human Community

- Social situations are improved, first by inner conversion of heart, then by changing unjust situations. **(CCC 1888, 1896, 1905-08, 1924-26)**
- Catholics are not just individualist, but are committed to the common good, which fosters dignity, prosperity and peace for all. **(CCC 1905-08, 1924-26)**

"All of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion. Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Define both individual racism and institutional racism.
2. Correctly identify whether examples of racism are individual or institutional.
3. Understand why both conversion of heart, and fixing unjust institutions, are necessary for disciples of Christ, and give examples of each.

Materials Needed

- Copies of the handout, "Individual Racism or Institutional Racism?" (Included at end of this packet.)
- Poster board or butcher paper
- Markers

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "What is needed, and what we are calling for, is a genuine conversion of heart, a conversion that will compel change, and the reform of our institutions and society. Conversion is a long road to travel for the individual. Moving our nation to a full realization of the promise of liberty, equality, and justice for all is even more challenging. However, in Christ we can find the strength and the grace necessary to make that journey."

- "All of us are in need of personal, ongoing conversion. Our churches and our civic and social institutions are in need of ongoing reform. If racism is confronted by addressing its causes and the injustice it produces, then healing can occur. In that transformed reality, the headlines we see all too often today will become lessons from the past."

- "The roots of racism have extended deeply into the soil of our society. Racism can only end if we contend with the policies and institutional barriers that perpetuate and preserve the inequality – economic and social – that we still see all around us. With renewed vigor, we call on the members of the Body of Christ to join others in advocating and promoting policies at all levels that will combat racism and its effects in our civic and social institutions."

Background Information for the Educator

- When injustices, such as the evil of racism, affect society and the Church, we are called to work for the "inner conversion" of the human person (CCC 1888).

    - **Individual racism** is when persons "believe themselves to be superior to others because of the color of their skin or their ethnic background" (*Open Wide Our Hearts*).
    - We can help address individual racism by seeking conversion of heart.

- We must also work to bring "appropriate remedies to institutions . . . so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it" (CCC 1888).

    - **Institutional racism** is when resources, power, and opportunities are distributed such that certain groups (i.e., in the U.S., those who are white) benefit, and others (i.e., in the U.S., people of color) are excluded. In our country, we find examples of institutional racism in the criminal justice and education systems, and historically unequal access to employment, housing, wealth, and the ability to vote.

- Transforming unjust institutions is part of working for the common good, which is "the sum total of social conditions which allow people, either as groups or as individuals, to reach their fulfillment more fully and more easily" (CCC 1906; *Gaudium et Spes,* no. 26).

  - The common good consists of "respect for and promotion of the fundamental rights of the person; prosperity, or the development of the spiritual and temporal goods of society; the peace and security of the group and of its members" (CCC 1925).

Instructions for the Lesson

Define Individual Racism using the definition above from the bishops' statement.

- Provide an example: Your soccer team plays another team that is predominantly made up of players of a different racial background than most of the players on your team. One of your teammate refers to players on the other team using a term that many people of that racial background would find offensive.
- Ask students to offer additional examples of individual racism.

Define Institutional Racism using the definition in the previous section.

- Share detailed information about a specific example of institutional racism using one of the backgrounders linked in the previous section.
- Ask students to offer additional examples of institutional racism. (Note: this may be a more difficult concept for students to understand. Be prepared to offer other examples or additional explanation.)

Have students break into pairs. Distribute the handout, "Individual Racism or Institutional Racism?" found below. Ask students to read each of the examples and then indicate whether it is an example of individual or institutional racism. After pairs have finished, go over each example.

Discuss the response by followers of Christ.

- We must confront individual racism by working for the "inner conversion" of the human person (CCC 1888).
- We must work to end institutional racism by bringing "appropriate remedies to institutions . . . so that they conform to the norms of justice and advance the good rather than hinder it" (CCC 1888). In doing so, we work for the common good. (See definition of the common good above.)

Brainstorm as a group:

- When you observe racist words or actions by friends, family, or others, how can you respond?
- What efforts are underway within the Church or society to confront institutional racism?
- How can you get involved?

You may wish to contact your diocesan social concerns office beforehand to identify local examples. You can also visit:

- Catholic Campaign for Human Development https://povertyusa.org/cchd-groups or
- Catholic Charities USA https://www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/our-ministry/ or
- Catholic Relief Services https://www.crs.org/get-involved/participate

Break class into small groups for a classroom activity. Assign half the groups "Individual Racism" and half the groups "Institutional Racism."

Groups should illustrate the concept on butcher paper, poster board, or similar format, including a definition of the term, one or more examples, and how we are called to respond as missionary disciples. Words and images may both be used, as well as other creative means, such as an original song to accompany the poster. Groups should select a reporter to present the illustration to the large group.

Summary

Close the session by sharing a quote from the Pastoral Letter like one of those mentioned above.

Ask the students to think about how their response to racism might be different because of their Catholic faith.

Conclude by offering the following prayer.

> Prayer for Peace in Our Communities
>
> Let us pray . . .
> O Lord our God,
> in your mercy and kindness,
> no thought of ours is left unnoticed,
> no desire or concern ignored.
>
> You have proven that blessings abound
> when we fall on our knees in prayer,
> and so we turn to you in our hour of need.
> Surrounded by violence and cries for justice,
> we hear your voice telling us what is required . . .
> "Only to do justice and to love goodness,
> and to walk humbly with your God" (Mi 6:8).
>
> Fill us with your mercy so that we, in turn,
> may be merciful to others.
>
> Strip away pride, suspicion, and racism

so that we may seek peace and justice in our communities.
Strengthen our hearts so that they beat
only to the rhythm of your holy will.

Flood our path with your light as we walk humbly
toward a future filled with encounter and unity.

Be with us, O Lord, in our efforts,
for only by the prompting of your
grace can we progress toward virtue.

We ask this through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

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Individual Racism or Institutional Racism?

Consider the following scenarios. Place a checkmark in one of the two columns to the right to show whether each is an example of Individual Racism or Institutional Racism.

Scenario	Individual Racism	Institutional Racism
1. The locker of a student is vandalized with an image that alludes to his or her race.		
2. A white sales clerk approaches African American teens who are exiting fitting rooms and asks them to open their bags to show they are not attempting to shoplift. White teens who are also in the store using the fitting rooms are not asked to do the same thing.		
3. At the Sign of Peace, a white person shakes hands with everyone around him—except for the Hispanic family sitting right in front of him.		
4. The junior high school in a predominantly white, higher-income town has a new facility, high-tech classrooms, well-trained teachers, small class size, and a high graduation rate. Another junior high school thirty minutes away is run-down, over-crowded, textbooks are shared by multiple students, and graduation rates are much lower.		
5. For Halloween, one of your friends, who is not Native American, thinks it's funny to dress up in a bright feathered head-dress and make warrior noises throughout the evening.		
6. A 2016 study of 4.5 million traffic stops in 100 North Carolina cities found that police were "more likely to search black and Hispanic motorists, using a lower threshold of suspicion, than when they stop white or Asian drivers." (The police were also less likely to find illegal drugs or weapons during searches of black and Hispanic motorists, despite the higher incidence of searches.[1])		
7. A teenager applying for an after-school job is unsuccessful getting called in for interviews when using her full name, Precious Jayla Williams. She revises her resume to P.J. Williams and is invited to numerous interviews.		
8. During World War II, after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, the U.S. government forced Japanese Americans to living in internment camps, saying it feared they may be loyal to the Japanese government even though they were Americans.		

[1] https://news.stanford.edu/2016/06/28/stanford-researchers-develop-new-statistical-test-shows-racial-profiling-police-traffic-stops/

Scenario	Individual Racism	Institutional Racism
9. Prior to the Civil Rights movement, many churches, including Catholic parishes, did not serve African Americans, or would require African Americans to attend a separate service or to sit in special sections in the back of the church.		
10. In the late 19th and early 20th century, boarding schools and orphanages operated with the objective of "Americanizing" Native children by forcing them to abandon all facets of their culture, including their native languages.		
11. There is a new girl at your school who wears a hijab that covers her hair and neck. The other kids tease her and call her a terrorist.		
12. A city is building a garbage burning incinerator. After residents of a predominantly white middle-income neighborhood complain about the planned site being too close to them, the city moves the site to a low-income part of town with mostly Hispanic residents.		
13. Neighbors call the police to report suspected burglary while an African American family is trying to move into their new home in a predominantly white neighborhood.		
14. In math class, a group of boys, who happen to be white, repeatedly disrupt class by making rude comments under their breath and snickering. The teacher warns them numerous times, and after several days, asks the boys to stay after class. You hear her warning them that she will send them to the Principal's office the next time. The next day, an African American student is similarly disruptive and is sent to the Principal's office immediately.		
15. An Eucharistic ministry of color notices that some white parishioners get out of his communion line, going to other lines where they receive the Eucharist from white Eucharist ministers.		
16. The U.S. Federal Housing Administration policies and programs in the 1930s-50s used strategies to deny mortgages, home loans and home ownership to Blacks. For example, the practice of "redlining" drew maps with red lines around predominantly African American neighborhoods to indicate where banks could not get federal insurance for loans they made. This meant African Americans could not get the same help as others to purchase homes.		

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